

A SECOND
LETTER
Concerning the
Holy Trinity.

Pursuant to the former from the same Hand;

Occasioned by a

LETTER
(There inserted) from one unknown.

By JOHN WALLIS. D.D.

L O N D O N,

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SECOND

LETTER

Concerning the

Holy Trinity

And to the Father from the Son

1925.08

LETTER

(There inserted) from one person

JOHN WATSON D.D.

1925.08

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A SECOND
LETTER
 Concerning the
Sacred Trinity.

SIR,

I Understand by your Letter (of Sept. 20.) that you have printed a Letter of mine concerning the Trinity; and have sent me some Copies of it to Oxford. But I am not there to receive them; and so have yet seen none of them: (But your Letter thither was sent me thence by the Post.)

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I have

I have, since yours, received (by the same way) a Letter directed to me, subscribed W. J. But I know not from whom. I suppose it is somebody in London, to whom you have presented a Book, for which he returns me thanks.

That Letter to me was thus, (with the Post-mark at London, SE. 23. from whence I supply the Date, which in the Letter was wanting.) For the Reverend Dr. Wallis, Professor of Geometry, at Oxford.

S I R,

I Received the Honour of your Letter ; and return you humble and hearty thanks for it. 'Tis writ in my Opinion, in a Modest, Peaceable, and Christian Style : And I wish it may please others as well as it doth me. I am afraid however, that it will not give satisfaction to the Scholastick Athanasian Trinitarian. For they are so particular, and withal so positive, in the explication of the greatest of Mysteries, as if they understood it as well as any Article of their Christian Faith.

Your Explication of Personality, gives no distast to me, when you say (page 3.) *They are distinguished by Personality.* And, by Personality I mean, *that distinction whereby they are distinguished:* Yet I'm afraid the High-flown School-Trinitarians will say, This is Trifling, and *idem per idem*. Though to me it hath this good Sense, That we know there
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is a Distinction betwixt them, which we call Personality; but we can affix no Notion to this Personality, which is common to it with other Personalities, either Humane or Angelical; and therefore we can only say, It is that distinction whereby the three Hypostases are distinguished.

But you still use a greater Latitude, as to the Notion of these Persons, or Personalities, when you call them *somewhats* (page 9.) That, you say, which is pretended to be impossible by the Anti-Trinitarians, is only this, *That there be three somewhats, which are but one God; and these somewhats we commonly call Persons.* This I take only to signify, that the true Notion, and the true Name of that distinction is unknown to us, yet the distinction is certain.

But the Deep-learned School-Trinitarians, who decide all things to an Hairs breadth, will, I imagine, ridicule this Expression.

A late Learned and Ingenious Author, you know, hath gone much further Dr. Sherlock. in his determinations about this point. He makes your *three somewhats*, not only *three Persons*, but *three Substantial Beings*, (page 47.) and *three Infinite Minds*, (page 66.) And the contrary, he says, is both *Heretic and Non-sense*.

Three Infinite *Minds*, is the same as *three Infinite Spirits*. And, by *Infinite*, the Author understands
here,

here, not Infinite in Extension, but in Perfection. So that the three Hypostases are *three Spirits*, whereof each is *Infinite in Perfection*.

Then, saith the Anti-Trinitarian, they are *three Gods*. For what better Notion, or what better Definition, have we of God, than that he is *A Spirit Infinitely Perfect*. And, if there be three such, there are three Gods. In like manner, *three Substantial Beings really distinct*, are three *Substances* really distinct. And if each of these Substances be endued with Infinite Perfection, it will be hard to keep them from being three Gods.

We do not well know what particular Explication of the Trinity those Persons gave, whom the Ancients call *Tritheites*. But this we know, that the great offence which is taken at the Christian Doctrine of the Trinity, by the *Jews* and *Mahometans*, is, from the appearance of *Polytheism* in that Doctrine. Which appearance, methinks, is rather increased than lessened by this Explication : And, consequently, the scandal which (to them) follows upon it.

But the Learned Author hath an expedient to prevent Polytheism, notwithstanding the real distinction of his three Infinite Spirits. Which is, by making them *mutually conscious* of one anothers Thoughts and Actions : whereby, he says, they would be so united, as to make but one God. That, methinks, doth not follow, That upon this mutual consciousness they would be but One God. That which follows

lows is this, That they would be three Gods mutually conscious. For there is no reason why this mutual consciousness should make their Godhead cease, if without this they would be three distinct Gods. No Union amounts to Identity.

It came in my way to mind you of this more punctual and demonstrative Explication of the Trinity, as it's said to be, that you might not expect that every one should be of your Mind, nor approve of your Modesty as I do.

Your Similitude and Comparisons, are as just as the Nature of the Subject will admit. The great defect of the First, seems to be this; That it cannot be said of any one Dimension, that it is a Cube, or a Body: Whereas it is said of every Person, that he is God.

Your Second Comparison interferes again with the Learned Author above-mentioned. For he says, (*page 72.*) 'Tis a mistake to think that Knowledge and Power, even in Men, *is not the same thing*; whereas you suppose them distinct, and, upon that, ground your Similitude.

I cannot but be of your Mind in this particular also. For Power belongs to the **Will*, and Knowledge to the Understanding. And 'tis plain, that we know many things that we cannot do: And, on the contrary, we can do many things, and know not

**I should rather say, To the Executive Faculty; or, Power of Doing,*

how

how they are done. It may be the Ingenious Author would be hard put to it to tell us how he pronounces his own Name; that is, what Organs of Speech are moved, and how; by what Muscles and Nerves; and what the whole Action is that intervenes betwixt the inward Thought and the outward Sound; or betwixt the first Cause and the last Effect. - Or, if he be so good an Anatomist and Philosopher as to understand all this, at least his little Son, or little Daughter, who can pronounce the same as well as himself, know not in what manner, or by what means they do it. - So, Fools and Children can move their Hands, Fingers, and all the Members of the Body, as well as Philosophers: Though they do not know, in what Method, or by what Mechanism, they are moved. These things are the Effects of Will, independently on Knowledge. And 'tis as plain, on the other hand, that we know how many things are to be done, which yet we cannot do, for want of Strength or Force. I can lift a Weight of two or three hundred pounds, but I cannot lift one of five or six hundred; though I understand as well how the one is moved as the other. And a brawny Porter shall raise that of five or six hundred, though he understand Staticks less than I do. I can bend a Stick, but cannot bend a Bar of Iron: Though I use just the same Method, and understand as much how the one is done as the other. And innumerable Instances of like nature shew, Knowledge and Force to be different things. But this, Sir, I say only in your defence.

Your

Your Conclusion also agrees very well to my Sense. And I think them exceedingly to blame, that presume to measure these Infinite Natures, and all their Properties, by our narrow Understandings. The Anti-Trinitarians generally are no great Philosophers, yet they take upon them as if they were the only Masters of Reason : And in the most Sublime and Mysterious Points, will scarce allow Revelation to be of greater Authority than their Judgment.

But however, on the other hand, (though I never felt any Inclination or Temptation to Socinian Doctrines, yet) I cannot heartily join with you in the Damnatory Sentences ; neither would I have us Spin Creeds, like Cobwebs, out of our own Bowels. In the Name of God, let us be content with what is revealed to us in Scripture concerning these Mysteries ; and leave the rest to make part of our Heaven, and future Happiness. To strain things to these heights, makes still more Divisions in the Church. We ~~that~~ now have School-Trinitarians, and Scripture-Trinitarians ; and either of them will have their Plea, and pursue their Interest ; till, by Zeal for Opinions which are disputable, we have destroyed Christian Charity and Unity, which are indispensable Vertues and Duties. I am, Sir, with Sincerity and Respect,

shall

Your obliged humble Servant,

London, Sept.

23. 1690.

B

W. J.

If

If you know from whom it is, pray thank him from me for his Civilities therein. And you may please to tell him, that he doth understand me aright, and puts a true sense upon my words: By Personality, I mean that distinction (whatever it be) whereby the Three are distinguished; but, what that is, I do not pretend to determine. And if I should guess (for it will be but Guessing) how it may be; I should not be positive, that just so it is. (Upon the same account, that it is not thought prudent in a Siege, to enlarge the Line of Defence too far.) There is a Distinction (this we are sure of) between the Three: This Distinction I call Personality: And by this word I mean that Distinction, whatever it be: But, what this Distinction is (or what degree of Distinction) I cannot well tell. If this be Trifling, I cannot help it, (nor, if they please to ridicule it:) But, to me, it seems to be good sense.

If others will venture to determine it more nicely than I have done; they perhaps may understand it more distinctly than I pretend to do; but will give me leave to be ignorant (therein) of what the Scripture doth not tell me.

*Of the Damnatory Sentences (as he calls them) I had said nothing. Nor do I think, that the Author of the Athanasian Creed did intend them in that Rigour that some would put upon them. And, if it be well considered how there they stand, he will find them annexed (at least so they seem to me) only to some Generals which he thought necessary, (as, That we ought to hold the Catholick Faith, That the Trinity in Unity is to be Worshiped; That the Son of God was Incarnate;) not to every Punctilio in his Explications. Which are
but*

but as a Comment on these Generals, how he thought they were to be understood, or might be explained. Which Explanations I take to be True, and Good; but not within the purview of those Clauses: And that a man may be saved (even in the judgment of that Author) who doth not know, or doth not fully understand, some of them. His true meaning therein, seems to me to be but this; That the Doctrine therein delivered (concerning the Trinity, and the Incarnation of Christ,) is the sound Orthodox Doctrine; and such as (for the substance of it) ought to be believed by those who expect Salvation by Christ. Certainly his meaning never was, that Children, and Idiots, and all who do not understand the School-terms, or perhaps have never heard them, should be therefore denied Salvation.

As to what he objects to me, That it cannot be said of any one Dimension, that it is a Cube, or a Body; whereas it is said of every Person, that he is God: He might observe, that I had already obviated this Objection. For though we cannot say (in the Abstract) that length is a Cube, (and so of the rest;) yet (in the Concrete) this Long thing (or this which is Long) is a Cube; and so, this which is Broad, or this which is High, is a Cube: Just so; we do not say (in the Abstract) that Paternity is God; but (in the Concrete) the Father is God; (and so of the other Persons.) The Personality is not said to be God, but the Person is. Which fully answers that exception.

What he cites of a Learned Author falls not within the compass of what I undertook to defend; (and that learned Person will excuse me, if I do not pretend to understand all his Notions; and leave it to him to explain

plain himself.) But what I have endeavoured to defend, is as much (I think) as we need to maintain in this point.

Where that Author calls it a Mistake to think that Knowledge and Power (in the same Man) are not the same thing: I suppose (not having the Book at hand) he means no more but this; That though they differ indeed (to use the School-language) *ex parte rei*, yet not *ut res & res*, but rather *ut modus & modus*; that is, not as two Things, but as two Modes of the same thing. And if he should say the like of Length, Breadth, and Thickness; I would not contend about it: For, even so, it will serve my Similitude well enough. If that of the three Persons be more than so: It is then (I think) such a Distinction as to which (in our Metaphysics) we have not yet given a Name. But of this, I determine nothing (because I would not spin the Thread too fine:) And content my self to say, It is that of the three Personalities in one Deity; without determining, How great that is. And I may the rather be allowed thus to forbear; Because I find, even in matters of ordinary Conversation (such as those but now mention'd) the School men are not well agreed, what things shall be said to differ *ut res & res*, and what only *ex parte rei*. Much more therefore may I be allowed a like latitude of thought in the present case.

I add no more but that I am

Tours,

Soundefs, Sept.

27. 1690.

John Wallis.

FINIS.

